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ABSTRACT

This speech discusses security measures that could be implemented in school buildings to reduce vandalism and its associated costs. Some suggested methods for reducing vandalism include (1) employment of security guards, (2) 24-hour deployment of custodial staff, (3) installation of unbreakable doors and tamper-proof locks, and (4) use of an intrusion detection system. Several anti-intrusion systems are described briefly. (JF)

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HOW TO REDUCE THE COST OF VANDALISM LOSSES.

By L. F. Edwards

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HOW TO REDUCE THE COST OF VANDALISM LOSSES

Webster defines vandalism as the willful or malicious destruction or defacement of public or private property. It also defines malicious mischief as willful, wanton or reckless to or destruction of another's property.

Those school administrators who must wrestle with budgets and financial projections for their school district are well aware of the cost of vandalism losses. The cost of education has increased sharply in the past few years. All of us certainly agree spending for more and better education is one of our soundest investments. However, a growing part of today's rising cost must be chalked up to pure waste. The cost of school vandalism losses together with the increased replacement cost values of buildings have increased drastically in the past few years. Many of you have read, for example, where it costs the New York City District $5,000,000 a year, Chicago, $1,000,000. In a 12 month period, Chicago had over 84,000 break-ins to their buildings. Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, St. Paul and other major cities have had similar experiences. The problem is not common in just the cities. It happened throughout the country, in the small towns and suburbs as well as the cities. Why have vandalism losses increased so drastically in the last few years? Psychologists have come up with several answers, but yet there seems to be no answer that offers a practical way to stop the soaring trend of vandalism. School administrators are looking into automated security and detection systems as a way to get more adequate protection while reducing the expense of manpower to guard school properties.

In the great majority of public school property insurance programs, the protection offered are the perils of fire, lightning, extended coverage, vandalism and malicious mischief. Normally the rate for vandalism and malicious mischief coverage is either .008 or .007 mils per $100 of insured value. This simply means for a building insured for $1,000,000, the cost of this coverage is from $70 to $80 a year. This is the reason so many of your insurance carriers are asking for increased deductibles. Although this in itself will not affect vandalism and malicious mischief losses, if you are interested in controlling your property insurance cost, some reasonable and intelligent property deductible program must be adopted. The size of the deductible will depend on the size of the district, budget elasticity and the quanity and quality of the maintenance program. The insurance industry is insisting that public school administrators accept a larger share of losses to the individual district. This is the fundamental reason why it is necessary for public school administrators to carefully analyze and adopt procedures necessary to control vandalism losses.

For example, it is expected these losses to public school properties will exceed $100,000,000 in 1971.

As a result of surveys made by public school officials, it was highly interesting to me to discover the great majority of vandalism losses are caused by students between the ages of eight to fourteen years.

As a matter of fact, in a recent FBI Crime Report to the nation, it contained the fact that of the 100,000 recent arrests for vandalism, 77% of the vandals were under 18 years of age and the greatest number

were in the twelve to fourteen year bracket.

From an insurance standpoint, we know it is possible to control vandalism and malicious mischief losses whereas it is virtually impossible to control arson losses.

Let's examine several methods of loss control which we will divide into two classes - the human effort and the physical effort - including community cooperation and electronic surveillance.

1. Watchmen and Security Guards - The Oak Park-River Forest High School in suburban Chicago which consists of a three-building complex, was plagued with vandalism and small arson losses. They hired private guards on a 24-hour basis on January 1, 1970 and by the end of March, they had apprehended sixteen would-be vandals or arsonists. Their incident of loss was dramatically cut.

Last November I participated in a panel discussion on this same subject during the annual convention of the Florida Association of School Business Administrators. Controlling vandalism losses was discussed at some length. The Dade County School District which is the largest in the state, has a security guard force of over 100 people in their system. They experienced a very substantial reduction in vandalism losses but could gain little ground on arson losses. Through security guards, the Hillsborough County School System reduced vandalism losses from over 148 per year to less than 40. It is not necessary to have complete surveillance for every building in the district, but simply place the detectors in those buildings that have suffered a series of vandalism losses.

2. A change of custodial deployment - The Pennsbury School District in suburban Philadelphia put their custodial staff on a 24-hour basis. This district was plagued with vandalism losses and as a result of this deployment, they substantially reduced the incident of loss.

3. To help curb the vandalism losses occurring while the school is in session, enlist the aid of students. Explain to them the effect vandalism losses have on their parents from a financial standpoint and the loss of use of school facilities as it affects the students. All of us know the great majority of public school children are well-behaved, sensible children. Use this sense of responsibility that most of them have.

4. If you are having an acute vandalism problem, explain the situation to the students' parents and local civic organizations and particularly Parent-Teacher associations. Outline the effect these losses have on the continuity of the educational system as well as the financial effect on the district taxpayers. Who knows, these parents may be most effective by paying closer attention to what their own children are doing.

5. Develop extremely close cooperation of the school administrators with the local police department in a surveillance program.

6. Solicit the assistance of neighbors living around or near your school building. Provide them with a telephone number or numbers they may call any time, day or night.

7. Attempt to keep your school facilities occupied as long as possible. Encourage the use of your buildings by the people in your community. This not only discourages vandalism but also builds community support.

8. Be certain doors are equipped with panels of unbreakable glass, plastic or metal. All locks should be tamper-proof and the custodial staff should be very certain all doors are locked when there are no people in the building. One example of this is in my own home town. A 17 year old senior hopped out of bed at 2:30 in the morning and took his little can of gasoline, walked over to the school, went through an unlocked door, poured gas on the stage, and lit it. A loss of over $200,000 resulted. The only explanation given by the student for committing arson was the fact his part in the senior play was not important enough.

9. This may be obvious, but when building new air-conditioned buildings, consider the total elimination of all window glass.

PROTECTIVE DEVICES

There are several ways to deal with vandalism. There are adaptions of existing burglary systems and there are new systems. Some are simple, some are complex. Some are sold as services, others are owned systems. Weighing the advantages and disadvantages of each system prior to purchase can lead to a decision that will provide more protection for the dollars invested.

There is an ever increasing supply of protective devices available in the market. A system of devices may be installed in those buildings in your district that are targets for vandals. You should be sure to consult with your police department as to the adequacy and effectiveness of these systems prior to purchase.

Detection systems to control vandalism losses that come equipped with an outside alarm are not very effective. The alarm itself alerts the vandal and usually he can get out of the premises before anyone arrives, including the police. These detection systems must either be monitored or wired into the local police station or to the homes of designated members of the administrative staff. Some of the systems available are:

1. Audio detection - This system is triggered by the increase of noise levels and it can spot the "stay behind" as well as an intruder trying to break in. Being portable, they can be located where needed or where the exposure appears the greatest.

2. Motion detection - Basically, this unit fills a classroom, corridor or office with high frequency sound, and any movement disturbing the wave pattern triggers the alarm.

3. Electrical-Mechanical - This system includes wires or switches installed on doors, windows, under doormats, etc. which are triggered by opening or breaking the contact.

4. Photo-electric - This system involves the use of an invisible light (infrared or ultra-violet) aimed down corridors or across stairwells. The alarm is triggered when the projected beam is interrupted.

5. Automatic telephone dialers - This unit automatically dials pre-recorded numbers when the alarm is triggered.

The Pinellas County School District was plagued with vandalism losses in certain buildings, primarily in their junior and senior high school facilities. They installed a system that is manufactured under the name of Sonitrol. This is a monitored system and the school district is presently training their own personnel to monitor rather than outside professionals. This system is extremely effective. As a matter of fact, the Pinellas School District has not purchased vandalism or malicious mischief insurance, but instead, handle the exposure through the monitoring system together with their maintenance program. We would like to emphasize that in most school systems it is not necessary to protect the entire building. Instead, it would be just as effective to monitor or install protection systems in the more tender areas of a school building. This would include the administrative offices, industrial aid instruction rooms, science laboratories and classrooms where expensive instructional equipment is used. Most of these systems are mobile and can be moved around to fit the individual occassion of use of the building.

I happened to see a very interesting article in the newspaper the latter part of February concerning the District of Columbia school system. They installed a noise-detection system hooked into an electronic console in a room at the Municipal Center. At the time of the newspaper article, it was hooked up to 52 schools. From December to the end of February it had led directly to the apprehension and

arrest of 22 persons and was the principal reason vandalism losses dropped from $19,720 in December, 1969 to $13,700 in December, 1970. I'd like to take just a few minutes to explain to you how this equipment works: If a door or window is opened after hours in any of the tied-in schools, an electric circuit is completed. A light flashes and a buzzer sounds next to the school's name on the console downtown.

The operator (there's one on duty 24 hours a day) then flicks a switch and that school's public address system becomes a giant electric "ear" that can "hear" throughout the school.

"If the operator hears something that sounds human, she calls the police," says Vincent Reed, school security director. "The thing is absolutely fantastic. It's real "Big Brother." You can hear dogs breathing over it."

By the end of the 1971-72 school year, the city hopes to have installed tie-ins at all 208 schools. The total price for a finished system will be about $980,000, Reed said, which is $75,000 less than the schools lost to thieves and vandals during the 1969-70 school year. $631,000 went for the replacement of broken windows, which officials admit the downtown machine cannot prevent.

What the machine can deter, however, officials said, is theft of office equipment and food, which cost the city $353,000 last year - double the previous year - and often disrupted cafeteria service.

The cost of a detection system will depend on your vandalism problem, size of your district, the number and size of the buildings that need protecting and the type of system you need.

Whatever system you adopt, its effectiveness will depend to a great extent, on the prompt apprehension and aggresive prosecution of the vandals and/or their parents. We realize this is a tender area. But if vandalism losses are to be controlled we must be "hard nosed" about prosecution of vandals and restitution of losses.